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THE HANDS OF SHANG-CHI.

MASTER OF KUNG FU

SPECIAL DOUBLE-SIZED
100TH
ANNIVERSARY ISSUE!



3032

"Call me Shang-Chi, as my **father** did, when he raised me in the vacuum of his Honan, China retreat. I learned many things from my father: that my name means 'The Rising and Advancing of a Spirit,' and that my body could be forged into a living weapon through the discipline of kung fu. Since then, I have learned that my father is **Dr. Fu Manchu**, the most insidiously evil man on Earth... and that to **honor** him would bring nothing but **dishonor** to the spirit of my **name**."

Stan Lee PRESENTS: MASTER OF KUNG FU!®

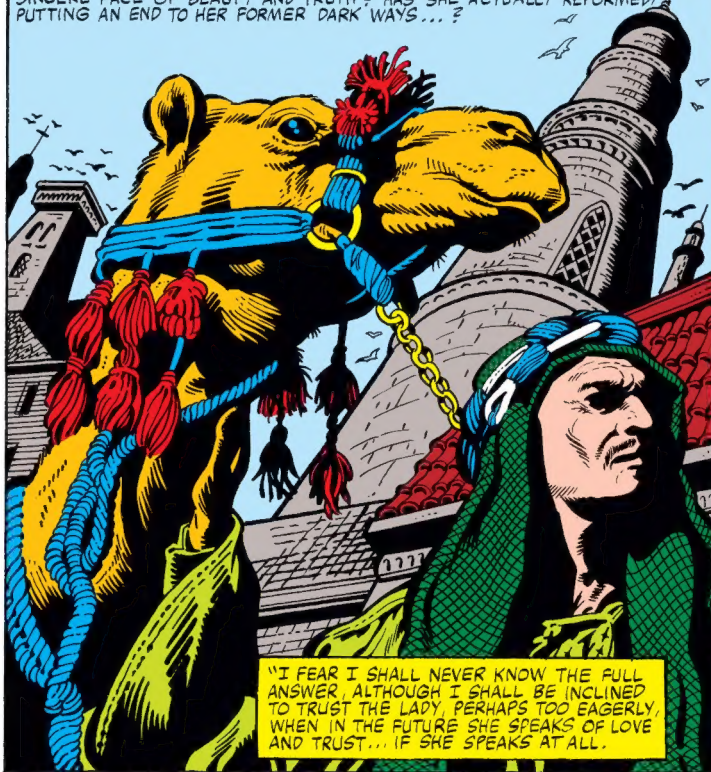
Featuring supporting characters created by SAX ROHMER

DOUG MOENCH / WRITER GENE DAY AND MIKE ZECK / ARTISTS JIM NOVAK / LETTERER BOB SHAREN / COLORIST JIM SALICRUP / EDITOR JIM SHOOTER / EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



THEN-THE IMMORTAL CARAVAN

FROM THE JOURNAL OF SIR DENIS NAYLAND SMITH, 23 MAY, 1932: "WAS IT ANIMAL CUNNING AND TREACHERY, MASKED AS A WOMAN'S LOVE, WHICH HAS BROUGHT US HALFWAY 'ROUND THE GLOBE TO THESE TEEMING STREETS OF CAIRO? OR WAS THE MASK SHED THREE NIGHTS PAST, TO REVEAL A SINCERE FACE OF BEAUTY AND TRUTH? HAS SHE ACTUALLY REFORMED, PUTTING AN END TO HER FORMER DARK WAYS...?"



"I FEAR I SHALL NEVER KNOW THE FULL ANSWER, ALTHOUGH I SHALL BE INCLINED TO TRUST THE LADY, PERHAPS TOO EAGERLY, WHEN IN THE FUTURE SHE SPEAKS OF LOVE AND TRUST... IF SHE SPEAKS AT ALL."

"IT IS OVER NOW, AND ALL THAT REMAINS IS THE GHOST OF IT, FLOWING THROUGH THIS PEN ONTO THE PAGES OF THIS JOURNAL."



"APPARENTLY, I HAVE ACHIEVED VICTORY. DIFFICULT, THEN, TO EXPLAIN WHY MY SPIRIT FEELS SO CRUSHED, MY HEART SO TORN..."



"I BROUGHT PETRIE, OF COURSE, AS WELL AS OUR NEW COLLEAGUE LYMAN LEEKS, A STOUT CHAP UTTERLY DEVOTED TO EVERYTHING ENGLAND STANDS FOR. WITH A THOUSAND LIKE HIM AND PETRIE, I DARE SAY, I COULD RECAPTURE ALL OF BRITAIN'S PAST GLORY WITHIN A MONTH."

I STILL SAY IT'S A TRAP, NAYLAND.

WHICH IS WHY YOU AND PETRIE ARE BACKING ME UP, LEEKS.

"WE MADE OUR WAY THROUGH THE DESERTED STREETS, REMARKING IN NERVOUS WHISPERS ON THE PALPABLE AIR OF MYSTERY EXUDING EVERYWHERE FROM OUR TIMELESS SURROUNDINGS..."

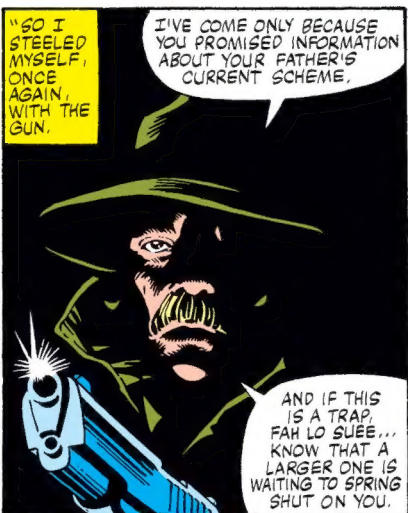
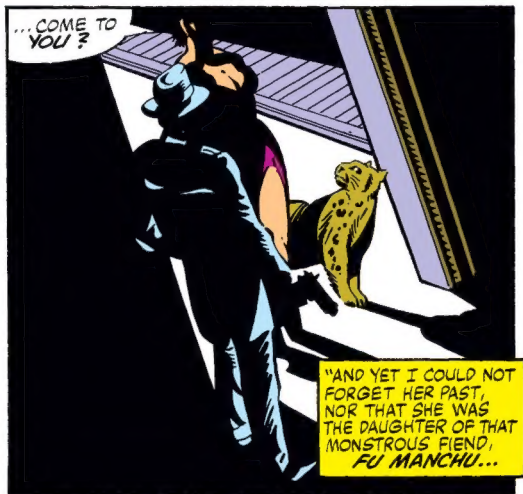
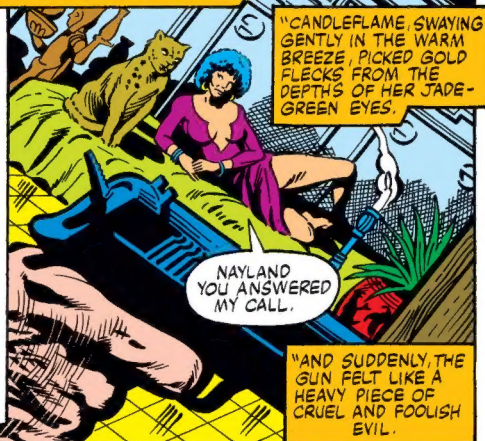
"PERHAPS THERE IS SOMETHING ABOUT EGYPT'S DRY AIR, THE CRYSTALLINE MOONLIGHT FILTERING DOWN LIKE THE BREATH OF AN ANCIENT GHOST ONTO THE COOLING NIGHT SANDS..."

"...SOMETHING THAT MAKES ONE WONDER IF IT IS NOT ALL A DREAM, FROM SOME LOST AND LONG-AGO SLUMBER..."

"A JACKAL SHRIEKED ITS SONG OF BLOOD FROM THE DESERT AS WE REACHED OUR OBJECTIVE..."

WAIT HERE WHILE I GO ON ALONE.

"THE SOFT SCENT OF MIMOSA DUSTED THE AIR AND THE NIGHT SEEMED ETERNAL, MY MISSION INCONSEQUENTIAL AGAINST ITS GREATER MIGHT OF MOON AND SHADOW. REACHING THE BALCONY, I WAS ALMOST OVERWHELMED BY THE SOLITARY SENSUALITY OF THE SCENE, BY THE MUSK RISING FROM HER EVERY PORE.





AND HOLDS IT OVER MY HEAD, TO MAKE ME DANCE TO HIS EVERY WHIM-- ALL THE WHILE PRETENDING MY SERVICE IS BUT THE LOVE OF A DUTIFUL DAUGHTER.

FU MANCHU IS BEYOND FATHERHOOD FATHERHOOD, BEYOND NORMAL LOVE. HE IS A MYTH--A GIANT EPIC FIGURE SUCH AS THE WORLD HAS RARELY SEEN. SUCH MEN CAN NEVER CONFINE THEMSELVES TO SMALL CONCERNS SUCH AS LOVE OR BIRTH.

AND YOU DON'T LOVE HIM?

AND NOW, MY FATHER HAS EVEN RISEN ABOVE THE CONCERNS OF DEATH...

ARE YOU SAYING YOU RESENT HIM -- THAT YOU'VE BEEN FORCED TO ACT AS YOU HAVE IN THE PAST?

I FEAR HIM -- BUT PERHAPS ONLY BECAUSE HE SHOWS ME WHAT I MAY BECOME MYSELF.

I AM HIS DAUGHTER. IF ONE IS BORN A FISH, ONE IS "FORCED" TO BREATHE UNDER-WATER.



BUT EVEN THE FISH LEARNED TO CRAWL ONTO THE LAND AND WALK ERECT...?

I WISH TO CHANGE, YES.

WHY?



BECAUSE I AM NOT BEYOND LOVE... AND A MAN SUCH AS YOU, NAYLAND, COULD--

YOU'D BETRAY HIM TO PROVE YOUR LOVE FOR ME?

IF I MUST.



THEN PROVE IT.

ONE OF THE ELIXIR'S INGREDIENTS IS FOUND ONLY HERE IN EGYPT. IT HAS ALREADY BEEN OBTAINED AND A LARGE QUANTITY IS READY FOR TRANSPORT.

BUT EVEN THIS--RENEWING HIS SUPPLY OF THE ELIXIR--IS MERELY A SMALL PART OF HIS MASTER PLAN.



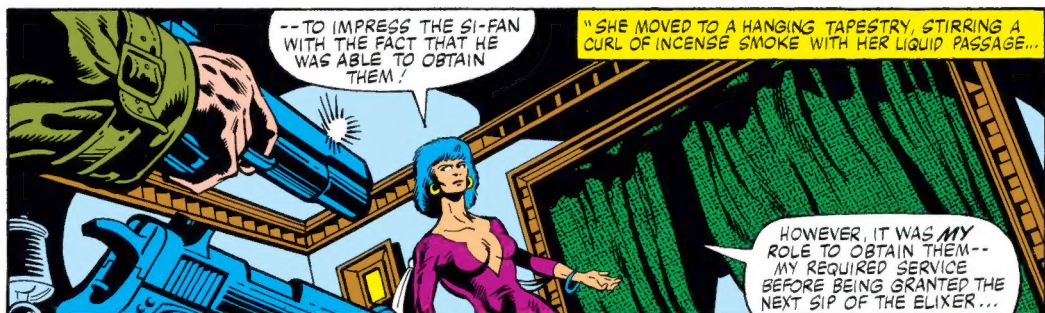
I WILL ARRANGE FOR YOU TO PENETRATE HIS GUARD AND LEARN THE FULL PLAN FROM THE INSIDE, AND THEN--

NAYLAND! YOU WERE TAKING SO LONG--!

EVERYTHING IS UNDER CONTROL, PETRIE. NOW CONTINUE, FAH LO SUEE-- **NOW** WILL YOU ARRANGE IT?



HIS SCHEME INVOLVES THREE ELEMENTS -- THE ELIXIR, A GROUP OF HIS ELITE SI-FAN ASSASSINS, AND THREE MYSTICAL ICONS OF IMMORTALITY-- THESE LAST TO BE USED, PERHAPS, MERELY FOR SUPERSTITIOUS EFFECT...



--TO IMPRESS THE SI-FAN WITH THE FACT THAT HE WAS ABLE TO OBTAIN THEM!

"SHE MOVED TO A HANGING TAPESTRY, STIRRING A CURL OF INCENSE SMOKE WITH HER LIQUID PASSAGE..."

HOWEVER, IT WAS **MY** ROLE TO OBTAIN THEM-- MY REQUIRED SERVICE BEFORE BEING GRANTED THE NEXT SIP OF THE ELIXIR...



THEY ARE THE IMMORTAL REMAINS OF THE THREE GREATEST WARRIORS OF THE AKNATON DYNASTY. FU MANCHU'S DRIVERS ARRIVE AT DAWN TO ADD THEM TO THE TRANSPORT CARAVAN--

--WHOSE DESTINATION IS KNOWN ONLY BY FU MANCHU HIMSELF AND, EVENTUALLY BY THOSE WHO COMPLETE THE JOURNEY.



"LEEKS KNEW AT ONCE WHAT SHE WAS SUGGESTING..."

DON'T LISTEN TO HER, NAYLAND -- IT MUST BE A TRAP!

I WON'T DO IT!



"BUT, I FALTERED AGAIN, MESMERIZED BY THE SINCERITY SHINING FROM THE MISTY DEPTHS OF FAH LO SUEE'S EYES."

THEN I WILL DO IT, LEEKS... ALONE.

THE TWO OF YOU CAN FOLLOW AT A DISTANCE, TO ENSURE AGAINST TREACHERY.

"THE MUMMY WAS --AND IS --A NATIONAL TREASURE. WE ARRANGED TO HAVE IT DISCOVERED BY THE AUTHORITIES AND, AGAINST MY COMPANIONS' DESPERATE URGINGS TO DISSUADE ME--



"--I TOOK ITS PLACE IN THE CASKET.

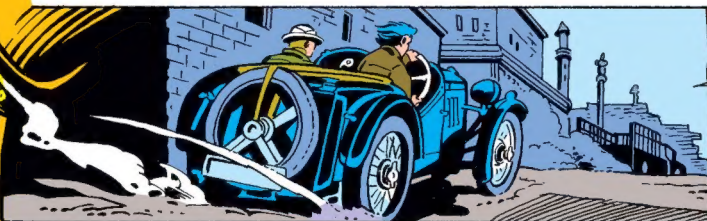
KEEP FAITH IN ME, NAYLAND.

WE WILL YET LIVE ON A MOUNTAIN ABOVE A VALLEY AND UNDER THE MOON... TO LOVE FOREVER.

"UNDER FAH LO SUEE'S SUPERVISION, I FELT MYSELF BEING LIFTED AND THRUST NONE TOO GENTLY ONTO A HARD, FLAT SURFACE..."

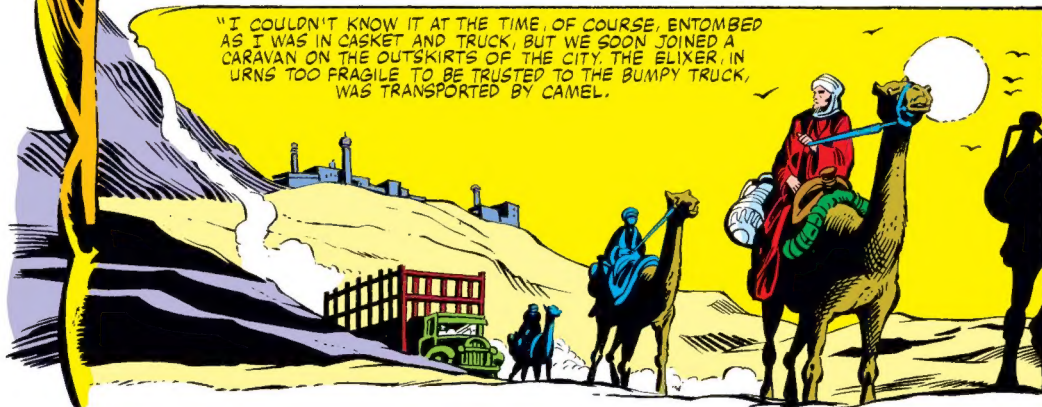


HERE COMES THE TRUCK, PETRIE, BUT FOR ALL WE KNOW, FAH LO SUEE COULD BE DELIVERING SMITH DIRECTLY INTO RU'S HANDS WITHOUT SO MUCH AS A STRUGGLE. HE'S TAKING TOO MUCH OF A CHANCE-- HE ALWAYS DOES...



PERHAPS THAT'S WHY NAYLAND IS THE LEADER. LEEKS --AND WE'RE THE FOLLOWERS.

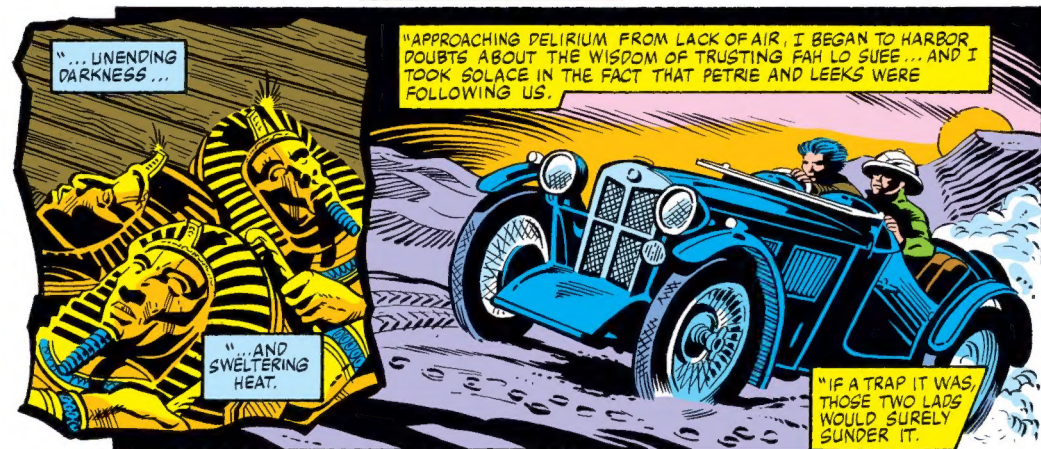
"I COULDN'T KNOW IT AT THE TIME, OF COURSE, ENTOMBED AS I WAS IN CASKET AND TRUCK, BUT WE SOON JOINED A CARAVAN ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE CITY. THE ELIXER, IN URNS TOO FRAGILE TO BE TRUSTED TO THE BUMPY TRUCK, WAS TRANSPORTED BY CAMEL.





"THEN, FOR
A LONG TIME..."

"THERE WAS NOTHING BUT
RELENTLESS MOVEMENT..."



"...UNENDING
DARKNESS..."

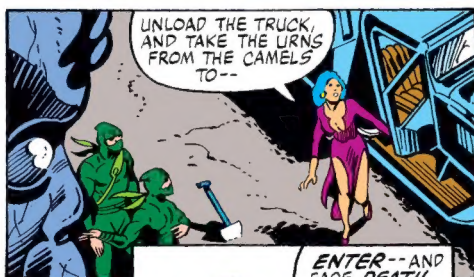
"APPROACHING DELIRIUM FROM LACK OF AIR, I BEGAN TO HARBOR
DOUBTS ABOUT THE WISDOM OF TRUSTING FAH LO SUEE... AND I
TOOK SOLACE IN THE FACT THAT PETRIE AND LECKS WERE
FOLLOWING US."

"...AND
SWELTERING
HEAT."

"IF A TRAP IT WAS,
THOSE TWO LADS
WOULD SURELY
SUNDER IT."



"DEEP INTO THE NIGHT, WE REACHED OUR
UNKNOWN DESTINATION."



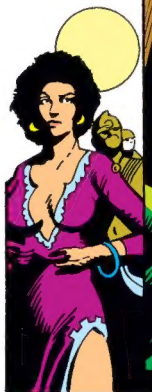
UNLOAD THE TRUCK,
AND TAKE THE URNS
FROM THE CAMELS
TO--

"EVEN FROM
THE CASKET,
I COULD
IDENTIFY THE
SOUND AS A
STRUCK GONG,
...AND THEN
THERE WAS
ONLY
RESONATING
SILENCE..."

"...AND A FEELING
OF EXPECTANCY..."

"...OF AWE..."

"...OF FEAR..."



ENTER,
MY SI-FAN...



ENTER-- AND
FACE DEATH
FOR THE LAST
TIME IN YOUR
LIVES!

"... FOLLOWED BY THE
UNMISTAKABLE VOICE
OF FU MANCHU HIM-
SELF!"

"SOON, I WAS LIFTED AND CARRIED DOWNWARD INTO SOME COOLER--ALMOST CHILL--ENVIRONMENT."

"THEIR STEPS ECHOED, AS IF IN CONFINED SPACE, AS I WAS TAKEN THROUGH MANY TURNS PASSAGeways, I WONDERED?"

"COULD IT BE THAT FU MANCHU HAD LOCATED AND EXCAVATED AN ACTUAL EGYPTIAN TOMB--?"

"FINALLY, I WAS SET IN AN UPRIGHT POSITION, AND FU MANCHU'S VOICE VERIFIED MY GUESS..."

"THIS TOMB WAS BUILT WHEN EGYPT WAS YOUNG, SO LONG AGO THAT IT HAS SINCE BEEN COMPLETELY BURIED UNDER THE ENDLESS TIDE OF SHIFTING SAND. IT WAS BUILT FOR ME, HOWEVER, I SHALL NEVER NEED NOR USE IT-- NOR NEED YOU EVER KNOW THE CLOSENESS OF TOMB OR GRAVE."

"SURELY HE LIED! SURELY EVEN HE COULD NOT BE SO OLD! AS FAH LO SUEE POSITED, IT HAD TO BE SIMPLE MUMBO-JUMBO DESIGNED TO SPELLBIND HIS HEATHEN SI-FAN..."

"YOU SEE TREASURE HERE, ENOUGH TO MAKE A THOUSAND TIMES A THOUSAND MEN WEALTHY BEYOND IMAGINING. BUT COMPARED TO THE CONTENTS OF THE URNS, ALL THE GOLD IN THE WORLD IS BUT TARNISHED PROSS!"

"FOLLOW ME, LOYAL SI-FAN, INTO THE GREATEST ADVENTURE OF OUR TIME, INTO THE OUTER REACHES OF SCIENCE AND MYSTICISM, AND THE CONTENTS OF THE URN SHALL BE YOURS! THE ELIXIR VITAE SHALL PASS YOUR LIPS AND FILL YOU WITH LIFE FOREVER!"

"THE ADVENTURE IS BOTH MONUMENTAL AND MOMENTOUS. I WISH TO MOLD YOU, EACH OF YOU, ALL OF YOU, ADMIRABLE WARRIORS AS YOU ARE --"

-- INTO AN ELITE CADRE OF PRIME ASSASSINS, THE GREATEST WARRIOR-ASSASSINS THE WORLD HAS EVER KNOWN."

"THE KEY TO DOING SO... LIES IN THE MIND."

AS THE MODEL, I HAVE CHOSEN THE MIND OF HISTORY'S GREATEST MASS ASSASSIN... UPON WHICH TO RESHAPE YOUR MINDS.



USING THE ADVANCED TECHNIQUES OF DRUGS, MESMERIZATION, AND BEHAVIORAL CONDITIONING, I WISH TO RECREATE EVERY PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTOR RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ORIGINAL MIND'S OB-
SESSIVE NEED TO KILL.



THERE WILL BE DEPARTURES FROM THE MODEL I HAVE CHOSEN, YES, SUCH AS THE ELIMINATION OF THE PSYCHO-SEXUAL FACTOR--



--ENABLING YOU TO KILL BOTH MEN AND WOMEN, TO KILL ON COMMAND, AND TO CONTROL YOUR OBSESSIONS IN THE ABSENCE OF COMMAND... BUT I PROPOSE NOTHING LESS THAN WIPING YOUR MINDS CLEAN...



--ERASING EVERY LAST VESTIGE OF YOUR PAST IDENTITY--

--AND REMAKING YOU AS **NEW BEINGS** WITH NONE OF YOUR PAST MEMORIES OR FEARS OR INHIBITIONS. YOU WILL BE MINE, TOTALLY AND COMPLETELY!



BEHIND ME ARE THE THREE GREATEST WARRIORS OF THE AKNATON DYNASTY.

THEY FOLLOWED THEIR PHAROAH, AND FOR THEIR SERVICES THEY WERE GRANTED THE IMMORTALITY YOU SEE BEFORE YOU-- IMMORTALITY IN THE WORLD BEYOND, AND ONLY AFTER THEY DIED! BUT WHAT GOOD IS SUCH IMMORTALITY--



--IF I HAVE BEEN ABLE TO HUNT THEM DOWN IN THEIR LAIRS AND PLUCK THEM FROM THEIR SLUMBERS WITHOUT SO MUCH AS A STRUGGLE?!



FOLLOW ME--!

SURRENDER YOURSELVES IN BODY, MIND, AND WILL, AND I WILL GRANT YOU IMMORTALITY WITHOUT DEATH-- HERE, NOW, AND FOREVER!



SHOW THEM!

SHOW THEM THE DUST THEY WILL BECOME SHOULD THEY REFUSE ME!



"THEY'D OPENED ONE OF THE CASKETS!"



"I COULDN'T TELL
IF MINE WOULD BE
NEXT... OR LAST..."



SHOW THEM!



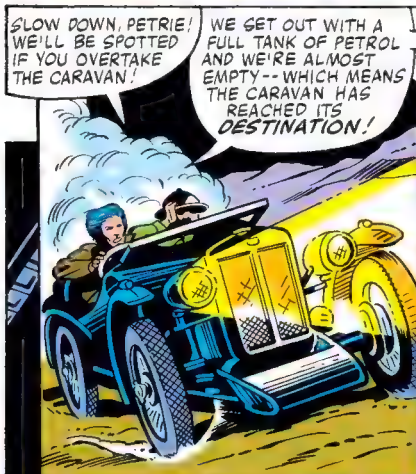
SHOW THEM THE
DEATH!



SHOW THEM THE
FATE THAT LIES
AHEAD!



SHOW THEM THE
LAST ONE!



SLOW DOWN, PETRIE!
WE'LL BE SPOTTED
IF YOU OVERTAKE
THE CARAVAN!

WE GET OUT WITH A
FULL TANK OF PETROL
AND WE'RE ALMOST
EMPTY-- WHICH MEANS
THE CARAVAN HAS
REACHED ITS
DESTINATION!



NAYLAND'S LIFE
COULD BE IN
DANGER EVEN
NOW!

SHOW THEM!



SWAX

FREEZE, YOU
BLOODY
HEATHENS!

ONE MOVE AND I'LL
PUT A BULLET RIGHT
THROUGH FU MANCHU'S
"CELESTIAL" SKULL!



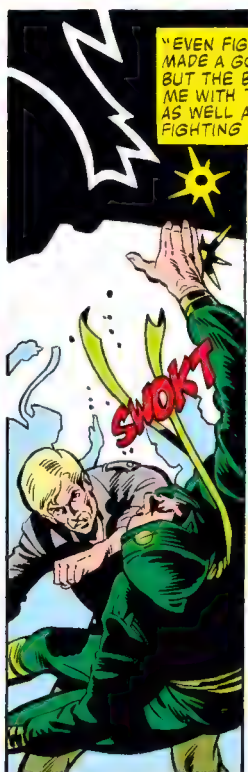
SSSSSMITH....!

GLARE ALL YOU WANT,
FU MANCHU-- I'VE GOT
THE GUN AND YOUR EYES
CAN'T HURT ME!



NOR, NAYLAND SMITH, CAN A BUZZING
FLY BLIND TO THE SHADOW OF MY
HAND... HURT ME.

TAKE
HIM.





"AND FINALLY, I WAS HELPLESS IN THEIR FIENDISH CLUTCHES..."

THEN IF HE MEANS NOTHING TO YOU, MY DAUGHTER, YOU CANNOT OBJECT...



...IF I USE THE PROUD NAYLAND SMITH AS THE FIRST SUBJECT OF MY EXPERIMENT...

...THE FIRST AND ONLY ONE WHO WILL NOT BE REPAID WITH THE ELIXIR VITAE.



WHAT THE DEVIL--?!

IT'S A DIG, LEEKS-- FU'S UNCOVERED A TOMB! THEY MUST BE INSIDE!



A FITTING END FOR YOU, IS IT NOT, SMITH, TO BECOME THE ONE THING YOU HATE THE MOST--



YOU WILL SERVE ME WELL WHEN THIS DRUG STRIPS AWAY YOUR MEMORY--



--AND A CONDITIONING PROGRAM STRIPS AWAY YOUR VERY IDENTITY.

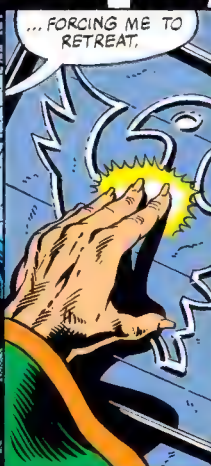
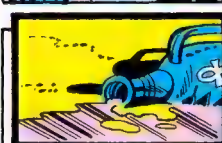
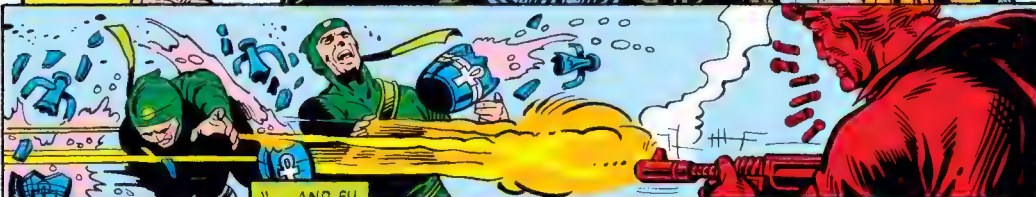
YOUR FIRST MISSION, SMITH, WILL BE THE ASSASSINATION OF DR. PETRIE...



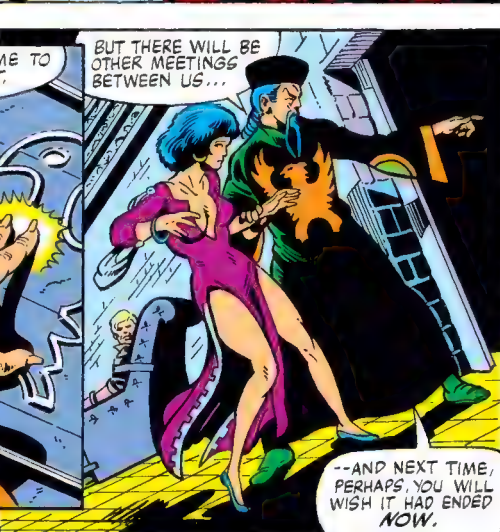
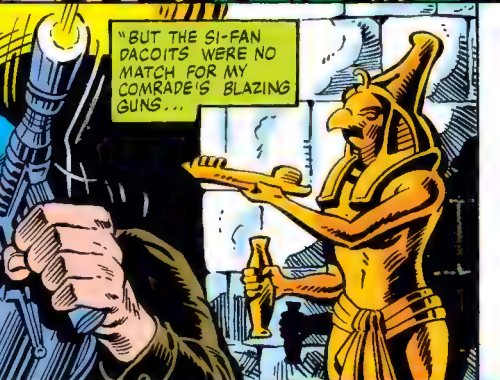
NO, FATHER-- NO!

SWAP

"THE GATHERED SI-FAN GASPED IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE UNTHINKABLE DEED--AS FU MANCHU SLOWLY AND COLDLY TURNED ON HIS TREMBLING DAUGHTER...



"BUT AS HE MOVED FORWARD, AS IF TO SMITE HER DEAD--



"SHE TURNED HER EYES ON ME
ONE LAST TIME..."



FAH LO SUEE!--!
I'LL COME FOR
YOU-- I'LL SAVE
YOU!!



"...BEFORE BEING
DRAGGED INTO THE
BLACKNESS OF THE
PASSAGEWAY."



HURRY, PETRIE--
GET ME FREE!



DID YOU BRING AN
EXTRA GUN?!

NO, BUT--

ALL CLEAR! I
THINK WE'VE
GOTTEN THEM
ALL--



AAGH-H!



MY SHOULDER--!

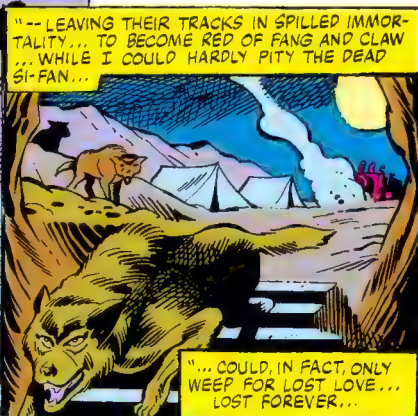
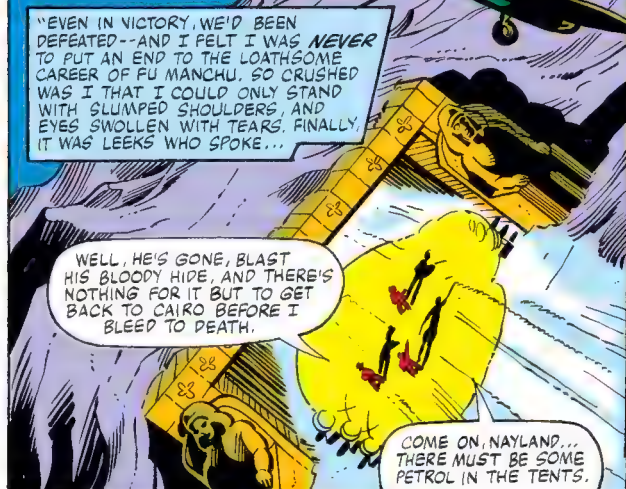
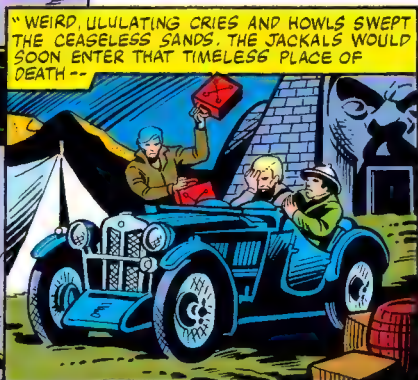
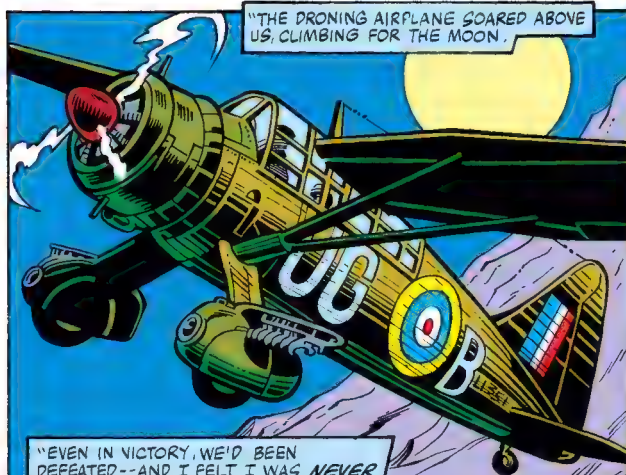
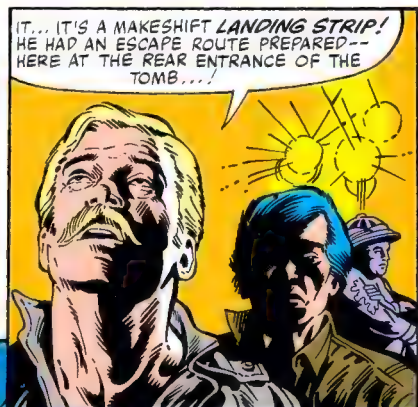
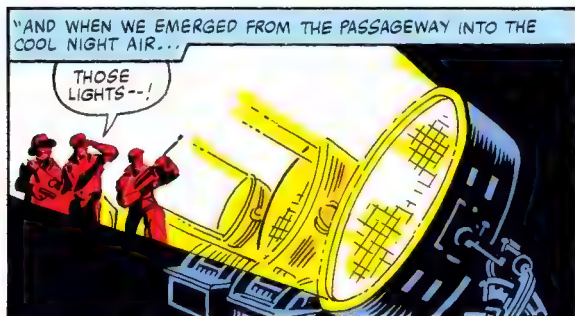


COME ON-- THROUGH
THIS SECRET PASSAGE!

WE'VE
GOT TO SAVE
FAH LO SUEE!



THIS GAS BOMB
OUGHT TO FINISH
THE LAST FEW!



child, in fact, only
weep for lost love...
lost forever...
But I wonder
if I know
of her
and if she
is at peace
with herself
because her
sacrifice has
And I also won't
either way, I
feel like a
lost child...

COME, NAYLAND, LET'S GO HOME,
THERE'S NOTHING MORE WE CAN
DO HERE IN EGYPT. FU MANCHU
HAS PROBABLY RETURNED TO
CHINA BY NOW.

AT LEAST WE'VE TOSSED A
STOUT WRENCH INTO THE
WORKS-- SET HIS SCHEME
BACK FOR YEARS, IF NOT
ENDED IT COMPLETELY.

YES, PETRIE, HOME
IT IS, I GUESS.

BUT I FEAR THE
SEED OF HIS SCHEME
WILL YET BEAR A
BITTER FRUIT...

...AND WILL
COME TO HAUNT
US IN THE
FUTURE, PERHAPS
EVEN IN FAIR
LONDON...

"BUT I WONDER... WILL
FAH LO SUEE'S BETRAYAL
OF FU MANCHU IN MY
BEHALF RESULT IN
HER DEATH?"

"OR WILL SHE BE GRANTED THE NEXT
NECESSARY DRAUGHT OF THE ELIXIR,
THE NEXT BITTERSWEET TASTE OF
IMMORTALITY?"

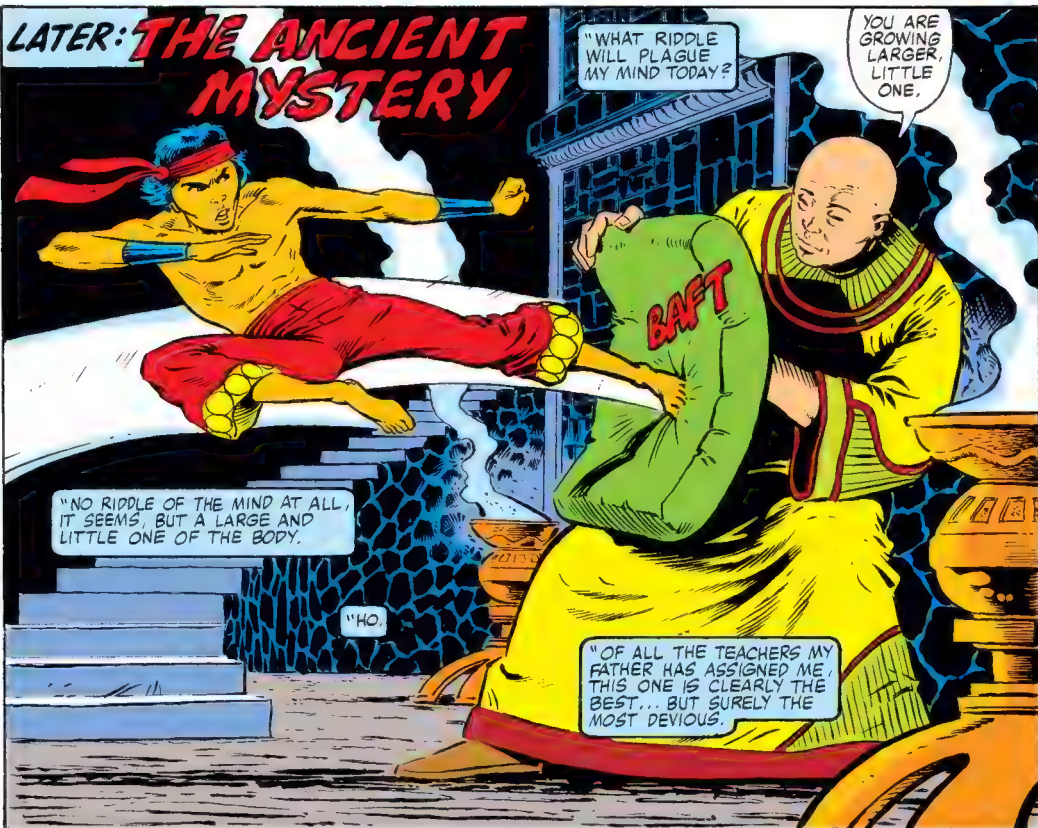
"WILL SHE REMAIN FOREVER YOUNG AND
BEAUTIFUL, WHILE I AM DESTINED TO AGE...
TO WITHER AND DIE WITH THE MEMORY OF
HER EYES BURNED INTO MY BLINDNESS? AND
IF SHE HAS ALREADY BEEN SLAIN BY HER
FATHER, WAS SHE AT PEACE WITH HERSELF
BECAUSE HER SACRIFICE WAS MADE IN THE
NAME OF LOVE...?"

"AGAIN, I FEAR I
SHALL NEVER KNOW
THE FULL ANSWER..."

"BUT EITHER WAY... I
FEEL LIKE DYING."

DENIS NAYLAND SMITH
23 MAY 1932

LATER: THE ANCIENT MYSTERY



"WHAT RIDDLE WILL PLAGUE MY MIND TODAY?"

YOU ARE GROWING LARGER, LITTLE ONE.

"NO RIDDLE OF THE MIND AT ALL, IT SEEMS, BUT A LARGE AND LITTLE ONE OF THE BODY."

"HO."

"OF ALL THE TEACHERS MY FATHER HAS ASSIGNED ME, THIS ONE IS CLEARLY THE BEST... BUT SURELY THE MOST DEVIOUS."

"BUT PERHAPS HE SPEAKS NOT OF MIND OR BODY, BUT RATHER OF MY SPIRIT."

SOON YOUR GROWTH WILL REACH ITS END, SHANG-CHI, AND IT WILL BE TIME FOR YOU TO GROW.

ONLY THEN WILL YOUR SPIRIT AWAKEN.



"NO-- HE HAS DENIED MY SPIRIT, CLAIMING IT DOES NOT YET EXIST."

"THEN IS IT MY MIND ALONE WHICH MUST BE CONCERNED WITH THE RIDDLE?"

THINK NOT, LITTLE ONE. CONCENTRATE ON YOUR BODY ALONE. STRIKE EACH BLOW WITH THE DEEP THOUGHT BEYOND ALL THOUGHT.



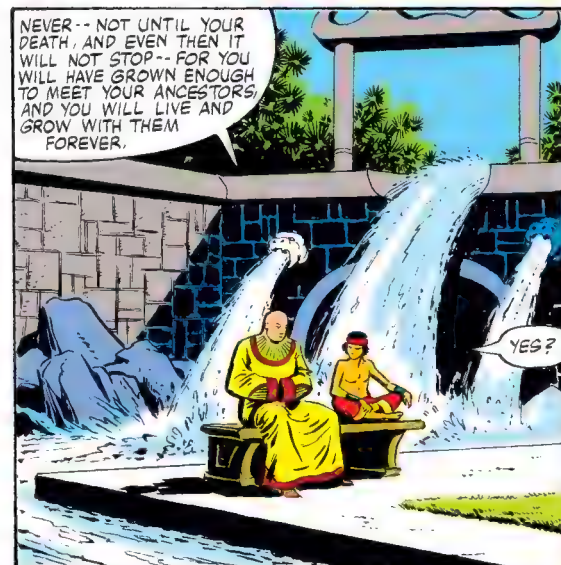
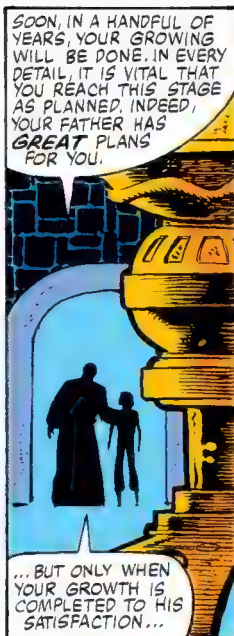
"THE ANSWER TO THE RIDDLE, THEN, AS EVER, LIES AT THE HEART OF ANOTHER RIDDLE."

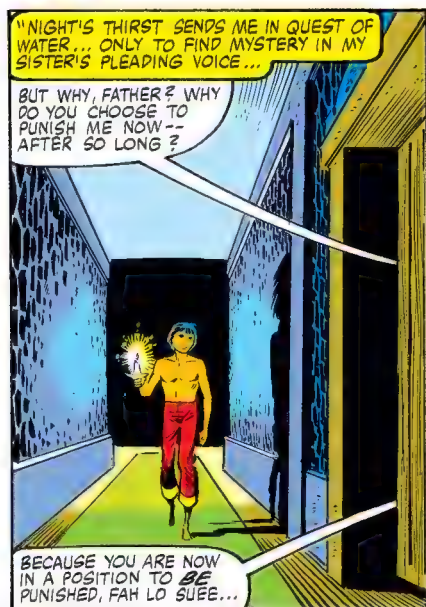
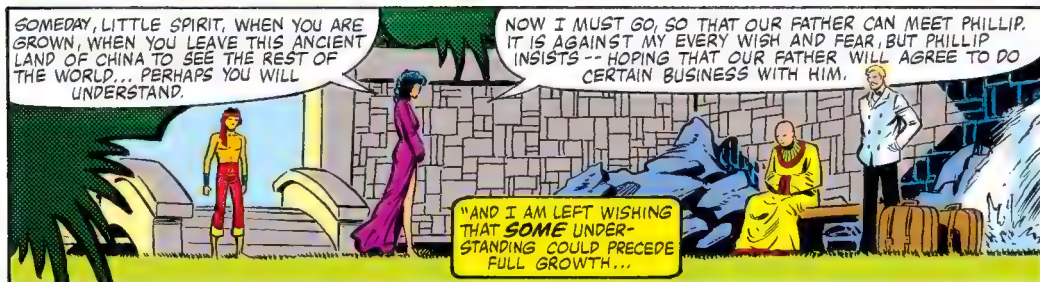
"SHOULD I FORGET ABOUT IT THEN? SHOULD I INSTEAD CHANNEL ALL MY ENERGY INTO MY TRAINING?"

ENOUGH FOR NOW, LITTLE SHANG-CHI. COME-- LET US SEE HOW BIG YOU ARE.



"PATIENCE-- BY CONFOUNDING ME, HE MERELY SEEKS TO ENLIGHTEN US BOTH."









--ESCAPED-- CUT FREE! DO YOU REALIZE WHAT YOU HAVE UNLEASHED UPON THE WORLD?! I HAVE COMPLETELY VERSED HIS MIND IN THE LORE OF THAT MADNESS-- REMADE HIS MIND TO DUPLICATE THE MODEL--!

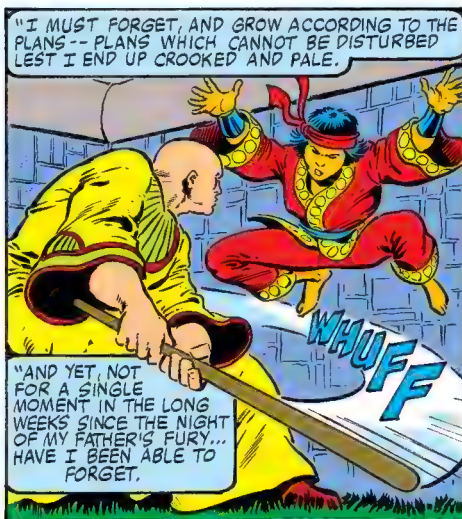
BUT I HAVE NOT YET MADE ANY OF THE MODIFICATIONS--AND NOW THE CHANCE IS GONE!

YOU HAVE REINCARNATED THE MADNESS-- AND SET IT LOOSE UPON THE WORLD!!

N-NO... I COULDN'T BEAR TO SEE IT! I ... I ONLY WANTED TO--



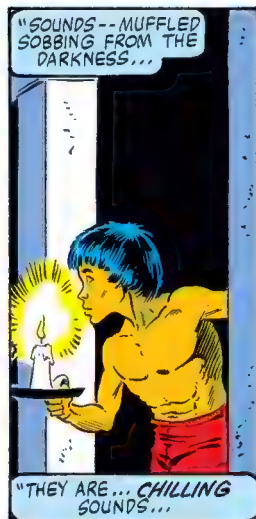
SILENCE--AND BEGONE! YOU WILL NOT DRINK WITH ME THIS NIGHT, NOR ANY OTHER! I ABANDON YOU TO TIME!!



"I MUST FORGET, AND GROW ACCORDING TO THE PLANS-- PLANS WHICH CANNOT BE DISTURBED LEST I END UP CROOKED AND PALE."

"AND YET, NOT FOR A SINGLE MOMENT IN THE LONG WEEKS SINCE THE NIGHT OF MY FATHER'S FURY... HAVE I BEEN ABLE TO FORGET."

WHUFF



"SOUNDS-- MUFFLED SOBBING FROM THE DARKNESS..."

"THEY ARE... CHILLING SOUNDS..."

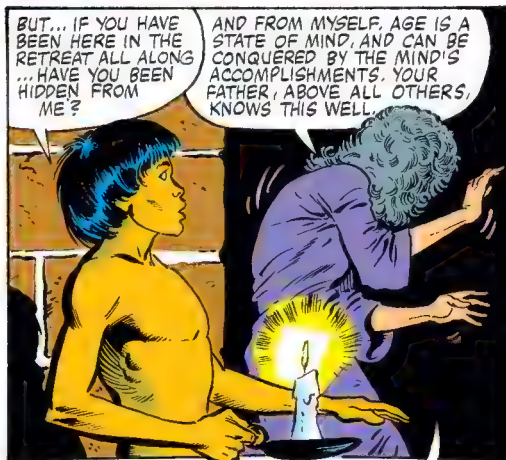


"... SILENCED ONLY BY MY LIGHT..."

WHO... WHO ARE YOU? I... I HAVE NEVER SEEN YOU BEFORE...

NO? THE AGE YOU SEE BEFORE YOU HAS EVER BEEN HERE... EVER WITHIN... WAITING... WAITING TO CLAIM ME... TO CLAIM YOU...

...TO CLAIM US ALL...



BUT... IF YOU HAVE BEEN HERE IN THE RETREAT ALL ALONG ... HAVE YOU BEEN HIDDEN FROM ME?

AND FROM MYSELF. AGE IS A STATE OF MIND, AND CAN BE CONQUERED BY THE MIND'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS. YOUR FATHER, ABOVE ALL OTHERS, KNOWS THIS WELL.

NOW FORGIVE ME, BUT I CANNOT FACE IT. YOUR FACE IS TOO YOUNG. I MUST HIDE, AGAIN ... BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE.

"BUT I CAN BEAR THESE SMALL MYSTERIES, ALL SEEMINGLY LINKED, NO LONGER."



"I FOLLOW THE OLD WOMAN AT A DISTANCE..."

"...TO MY FATHER FU MAN-CHU'S PRIVATE CHAMBER."

--NO MORE--NO MORE!
I BEG YOUR FOR-
GIVENESS!



AND I PROMISE TO ATONE!

THE MADNESS WILL BE NO MORE! I WILL NEVER REST UNTIL IT IS ENDED!



I SWEAR IT!
I SWEAR IT!

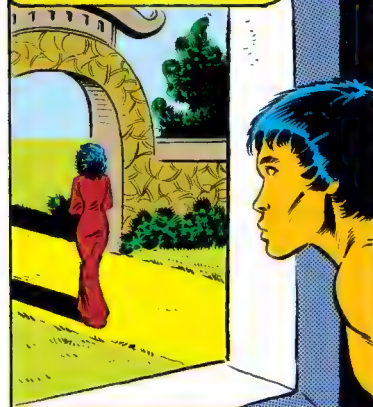
VERY WELL--YOU HAVE SUFFERED ENOUGH, AND I AM NOT A CRUEL MAN. DRINK, OLD WOMAN--IT WILL SOOTHE YOU...



OH, THANK YOU...
THANK YOU!

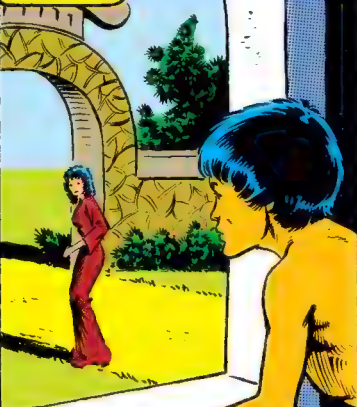


"MORNING: MY SISTER LEAVES THE RETREAT, BUT WHAT OF HER LOVER-- THAT WHICH SHE CLAIMED MADE HER LEAVE IN THE FIRST PLACE?"



"IS HE STILL NOT HERE? OR IS HE, SOME- HOW, THE 'MADNESS' WHICH ESCAPED? HAS THE LOVE MY SISTER BROUGHT HERE NOW BECOME LOST...?"

"WHATEVER THE REASONS, MY SISTER LEAVES ALONE. AND I SUSPECT, TOO, THAT SOMEHOW THE OLD WOMAN HAS ALSO GONE."



"BUT WHO WAS SHE? WHAT MEDICINE DID SHE RECEIVE FROM MY FATHER?"

"WILL IT ALL FOREVER REMAIN AN ANCIENT MYSTERY..."



"...NO MATTER HOW OLD I MAY GROW...?"

NOW--THE WHITECHAPEL MADNESS

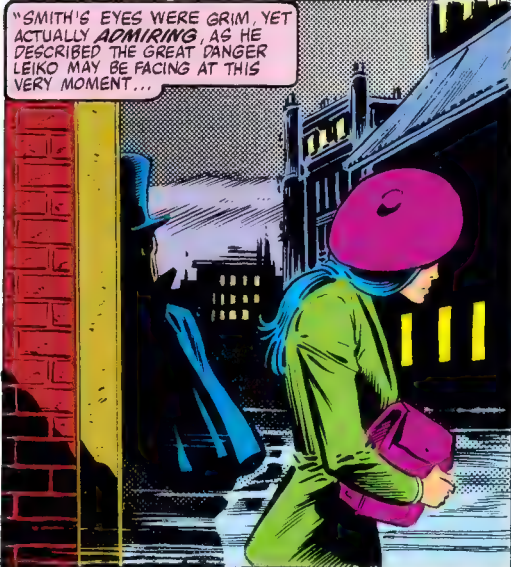
"NAYLAND SMITH HAS JUST INFORMED ME THAT THREE WOMEN HAVE BEEN MURDERED IN THE STREETS OF WHITECHAPEL, OR SPITALFIELDS--A POORER SECTION OF LONDON WHICH HAS CHANGED LITTLE IN THE LAST HUNDRED YEARS..."



"... AND THAT, TO PREVENT FURTHER DEATH, LEIKO HAS DEPARTED ON WHAT HE CALLS 'HER FIRST SOLO MISSION IN YEARS'..."



"SMITH'S EYES WERE GRIM, YET ACTUALLY *ADMIRING*, AS HE DESCRIBED THE GREAT DANGER LEIKO MAY BE FACING AT THIS VERY MOMENT..."



"... AS SHE BOLDLY OFFERS HERSELF TO THE NIGHT-- PERHAPS TO BECOME THE MAD SLAYER'S NEXT VICTIM."



"THUS, I HAVE RETURNED TO SMITH'S SCOTTISH CASTLE FROM THE DOCKS OF ABERDEEN--AFTER NEARLY LOSING MY LIFE--ONLY TO FIND THAT LEIKO IS GONE, AND IN PERIL OF LOSING *HER'S*...



JUST WHO *IS* THIS "MAD SLAYER," SMITH?

I KNOW OF HIM, LAD... OF THE PLAN TO CREATE HIM... ALTHOUGH I HAD HOPED HE WOULD NEVER EXIST, NEVER COME TO MATURITY...

"I SCAN THEIR TROUBLED FACES--PETRIE, SMITH, LEIKS, MELISSA GREVILLE, RESTON--AND FINALLY SMITH SIGHS...

IT'S ALL IN HERE, LAD-- IN MY JOURNAL ENTRY FOR THE 23RD OF MAY, 1932.



IT WILL BE EASIER IF YOU JUST READ IT...

"IT BEGINS: WAS IT ANIMAL CUNNING AND TREACHERY, MASQUED AS A WOMAN'S LOVE, WHICH HAS BROUGHT US HALF-WAY ROUND THE GLOBE TO THESE TEEMING STREETS OF CAIRO?--



GOOD-- HE'S STILL FOLLOWING ME.



"... AND IT MOVES THROUGH AN INCREDIBLE ACCOUNT OF EGYPTIAN INTRIGUE--WITH DESERT CARAVANS, TOMBS AND MUMMY CASKETS, SI-FAN ASSASSINS, THE ELIXIR VITAE... AND, BEHIND IT ALL, MY FATHER *FU MANCHU*...

SOMETHING'S SCARING HIM OFF...

THE POLICE--WHEN YOU NEED THEM, THEY'RE NEVER AROUND--WHEN YOU DON'T, THEY POP UP LIKE CLOCKWORK TO SPOIL EVERYTHING...



EVENIN' MISS. BIT OF THE FOG, EH?

"... AND WHEN I HAVE REACHED THE LAST TEAR-STAINED LINE --

I STILL DO NOT UNDERSTAND, SMITH.

THE PERFECT SLAYER, LAD -- THE COMPLETE ASSASSIN -- IS ABROAD IN THE STREETS OF LONDON ONCE AGAIN. SOMEWHERE BETWEEN 1952 AND NOW, THE SEEDS OF FU MANCHU'S 45 YEAR OLD PLAN HAVE BORNE FRUIT...

...AND IT'S FINALLY COME HOME TO HAUNT US.

DON'T YOU SEE, LAD? THE RECENT SLAYINGS PROVE THAT FU MANCHU'S SCHEME HAS FINALLY SUCCEEDED!

MOREOVER, IT PROVES THAT YOUR FATHER KNEW THE IDENTITY OF THE MOST MYSTERIOUS MASS MURDERER IN HISTORY -- A FIEND WHOSE IDENTITY IS STILL UNKNOWN TO THE WORLD AT LARGE...

THE INFAMOUS JACK THE RIPPER -- RED SLAYER OF WHITECHAPEL!

TO DUPLICATE THE RIPPER'S PSYCHE IN HIS SI-FAN, FU MANCHU HAD TO KNOW EVERYTHING ABOUT THE RIPPER -- WHO HE WAS, HOW HE WAS RAISED, HIS ENVIRONMENT, HIS PARENTS AND FRIENDS -- EVERYTHING.

TRUE, HE PLANNED TO CONDITION HIS SI-FAN TO SLAY **ANYONE ON COMMAND**, ELIMINATING THE PSYCHO-SEXUAL FACTOR LIMITING JACK'S VICTIMS TO WOMEN, BUT TO RECREATE THE HOMICIDAL FRENZY...

... WELL, HE **HAD** TO HAVE INTIMATE KNOWLEDGE OF THE RIPPER HIMSELF.

OOPS -- SEEMS I'VE LEFT SOMETHING BEHIND, OFFICER.

NOW I'VE GOT TO REVERSE ROLES -- AND STALK HIM.

THERE -- BUT HE'LL LOSE ME IN THIS MAZE OF ALLEYWAYS AND CRUMBLING BUILDINGS!

GONE...

NOTHING BUT FOG...

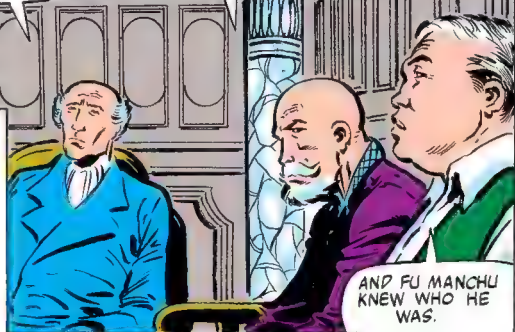
MY FATHER HAD THIS "INTIMATE KNOWLEDGE" YET NO ONE ELSE HAD A CLUE?

OH, PLENTY OF CLUES, LAD, AND THEORIES IN ABUNDANCE, ACCUSING EVERYONE FROM RENOWNED PHYSICIANS OF THE DAY TO THE ACTING POLICE CHIEF...

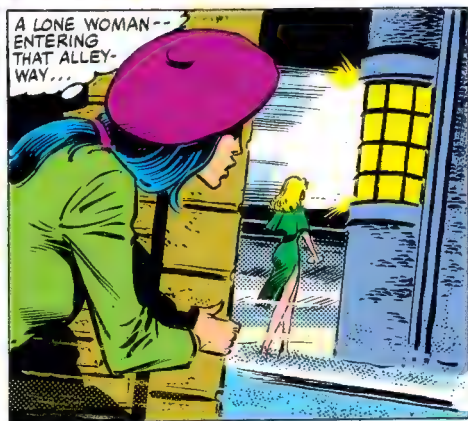


THERE'S EVEN THE RECENT THEORY THAT THE RIPPER WAS NONE OTHER THAN QUEEN VICTORIA'S GRAND-SON EDWARD, THE PRINCE OF WALES, WHO--

UH, YES, PETRIE, QUITE. BUT THE FACT IS, NO THEORY HAS BEEN PROVEN. ALL THAT'S CERTAIN IS THAT THE RIPPER EXISTED...



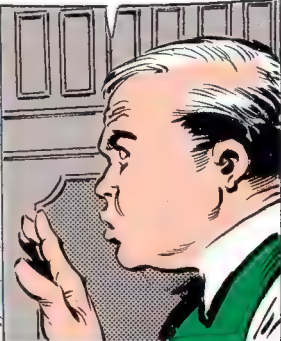
AND FU MANCHU KNEW WHO HE WAS.



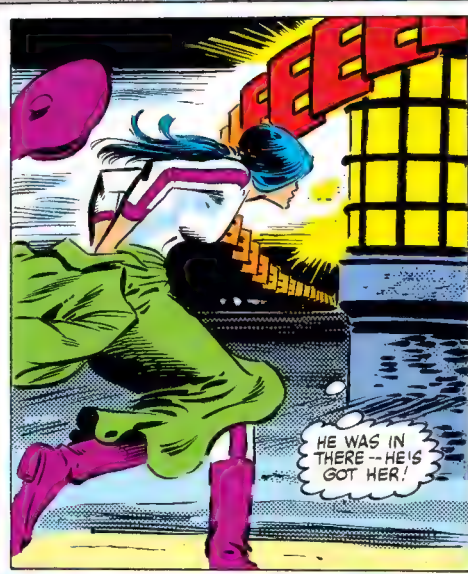
A LONE WOMAN-- ENTERING THAT ALLEY-WAY...

BUT HOW--? HOW COULD MY FATHER HAVE KNOWN?

HOW DID THAT DEVIL KNOW ANYTHING? NETWORKS OF INTERLOCKING SECRET SOCIETIES, DEBTS RECEIVED FROM THE LONG AND TWISTING MACHINATIONS OF AN IMMORTAL'S MACHIAVELLIAN AFFAIRS, A LEGION OF SPIES, POLICE OFFICIALS CORRUPTED INTO INFORMANTS BY MONEY OR FEAR...



WHO KNOWS HOW HE KNEW? HE KNEW. AND WE LET THE INFORMATION SLIP RIGHT THROUGH OUR HANDS--THE NAME OF JACK THE RIPPER--DISAPPEARING IN AN OLD BIPLANE SOARING INTO THE MOON.



HE WAS IN THERE--HE'S GOT HER!

AND HE ALMOST TURNED ME... ME... INTO THE PSYCHOLOGICAL REINCARNATION OF THE RIPPER. LORD HELP ME, BUT IT COULD HAVE BEEN ME STALKING THOSE STREETS IN WHITECHAPEL RIGHT NOW...





THE BOTTOM LINE, SHANG-CHI, IS THIS-- EVEN THOUGH FU HIMSELF IS PRESUMABLY DEAD AFTER THAT UNTIDY BUSINESS IN NEW YORK, HIS TIME-DELAYED EVIL LIVES ON THROUGH THE INSTIGATION OF A MODERN RIPPER BENT ON RECREATING THE SLAYINGS OF 1888.

AND LEIKO KNEW ALL THIS--? SHE KNEW ALL ALONG--?



GET AWAY FROM HER!!

YES, LAD, I TOLD HER YEARS AGO-- WHEN SHE FIRST JOINED MI-6 UNDER MY COMMAND. WHEN WE HEARD THE RECENT NEWS REPORTS, WE BOTH KNEW IT *HAD* TO BE THE UNFINISHED BUSINESS FROM 45 YEARS PAST...

-- THIS BULLETIN: POLICE HAVE DISCOVERED THE MUTILATED BODIES OF TWO WOMEN IN THE WHITE-CHAPEL SECTION OF LONDON...



SHE'S CHANGED, LAD-- PERHAPS TIRED OF BEING IN YOUR SHADOW. SHE YEARS TO BE THE WOMAN SHE ONCE WAS, UNAFRAID TO TAKE MATTERS INTO HER OWN HANDS.

YOU HEARD?

YES. I'M GOING TO LONDON.





HE'S GONE NOW-- ARE YOU ALL RIGHT ?!

Y-YES... HE RAN AWAY... WHEN YOU CAME...

AND YOU LET HER GO-- ? YOU LET HER WALK RIGHT INTO IT-- ?! SHE COULD BE KILLED, SMITH!



BUT HE... HE...

NOOOOOO



SHUMPP



COME, RESTON.

WE'RE TAKING THE HELICOPTER TO LONDON-- NOW.

VERY WELL.

"BUT LET US HOPE THE END IS FAR FROM WRITTEN..."

I'M COMING, TOO-- IF LEIKO'S LIFE IS IN DANGER, WE'VE ALREADY WASTED ENOUGH TIME.

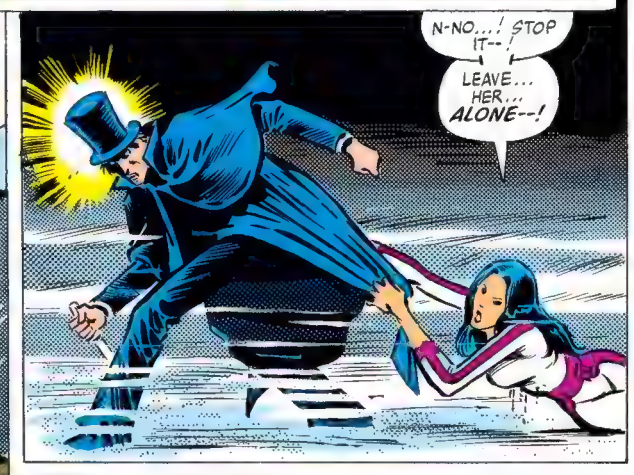
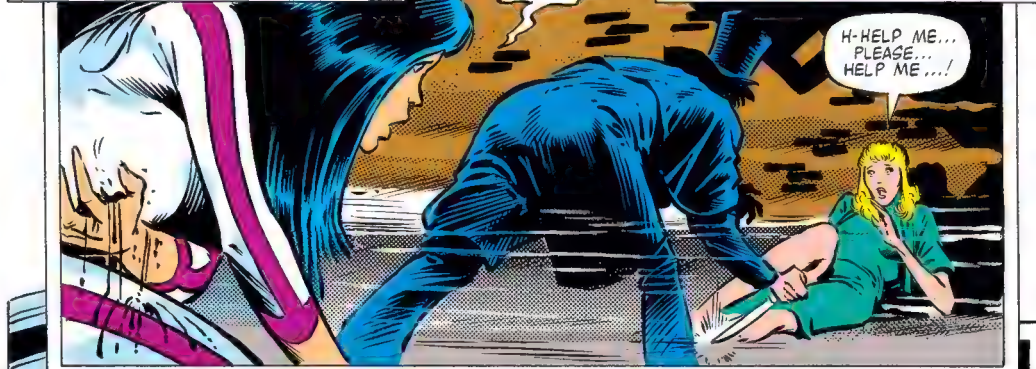
RIGHT, MELISSA.

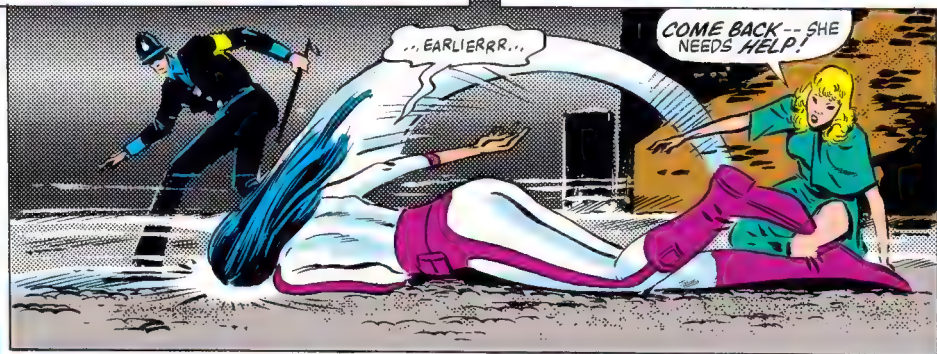
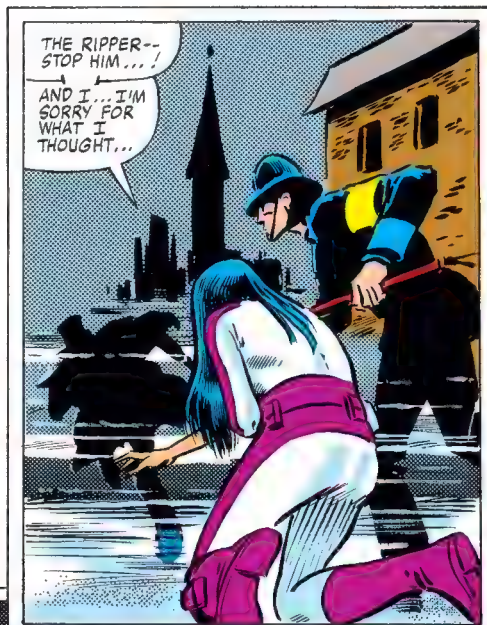
AND DON'T EVEN TRY TO ARGUE WITH HER, CHI-- SHE'S BEEN TAKING PAGES FROM LEIKO'S BOOK.

SHUMPP



"SMITH CALLED IT THE WHITECHAPEL MADNESS. I WONDER... COULD IT RELATE TO ANOTHER MADNESS...?"







"EAST END HOSPITAL..."

-- BE ALL RIGHT, SHANG... BUT THEY SAID I'LL HAVE TO STAY HERE FOR SIX WEEKS... AND I ... I'LL HAVE A SCAR, SHANG...

I HAVE MANY, LEIKO. WE ALL DO.

SORRY I... I FAILED...



I KNOW YOU'RE GOING AFTER HIM, SHANG... AND I WON'T TRY TO STOP YOU... BUT BE CAREFUL... VERY CAREFUL... HE'S MORE THAN A NORMAL MAN... MANIACAL STRENGTH... LIKE SOME SUPER-HUMAN MADNESS THAT CAN'T DIE...

"AND HER WORDS BRING THE FULL TRUTH HOME..."



I PROMISE TO ATONE! THE MADNESS WILL BE NO MORE! I WILL NEVER REST UNTIL IT IS ENDED!

I SWEAR IT!

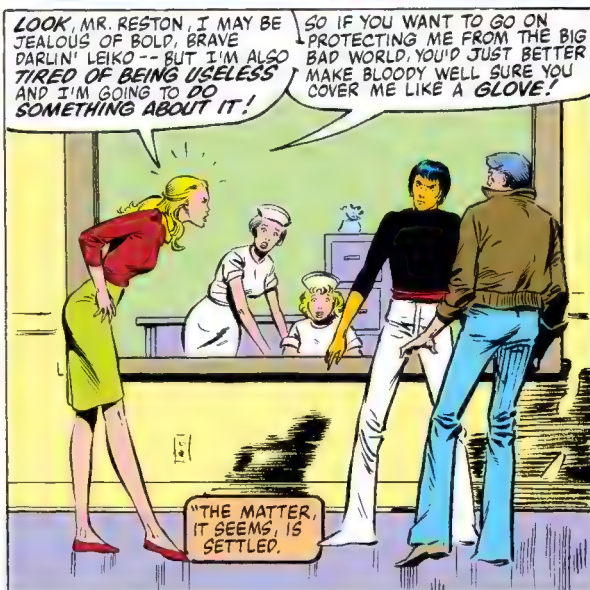
"THE ELIXIR VITAE... PERHAPS HE NEVER WILL DIE..."



"AS WE LEAVE THE HOSPITAL ROOM, I SENSE A GROWING TENSENESS IN MELISSA GREVILLE'S EVERY MUSCLE. AT LAST SHE VOICES IT, ALL AT ONCE, IN A TUMBLE OF WORDS..."

THERE'S ONLY ONE WAY TO CATCH HIM -- I'LL BE THE DECOY NOW.

NO, JUST FORGET IT BEFORE I--



LOOK, MR. RESTON, I MAY BE JEALOUS OF BOLD, BRAVE DARLIN' LEIKO -- BUT I'M ALSO TIRED OF BEING USELESS AND I'M GOING TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT!

SO IF YOU WANT TO GO ON PROTECTING ME FROM THE BIG BAD WORLD, YOU'D JUST BETTER MAKE BLOODY WELL SURE YOU COVER ME LIKE A GLOVE!

"THE MATTER, IT SEEMS, IS SETTLED."

"AND SO, WITHIN THE AREA CORDONED BY THE POLICE, WE CAN ONLY HOPE THAT THE RIPPER IS STILL HERE... AND THAT HE WILL TAKE MELISSA'S BAIT."

WELL, YOU CAN'T STAY *THIS* CLOSE OR HE'LL NEVER COME NEAR ME.

GO ON, YOU TWO--GET MOVING!

"EVEN THOUGH SMITH IS CONVINCED THAT THE DETAILS OF RECREATING THE ORIGINAL RIPPER'S MURDERS HAVE BEEN ABANDONED, IT DOES NOT MEAN THAT THE MAN WILL NOT STRIKE AGAIN TONIGHT..."

"AND IF NOT, WE WILL HAVE TO SEEK HIM OUT WHERE HE--"

"I WAS WRONG--"

"--AND MELISSA'S LIFE IS IN DANGER ALMOST IMMEDIATELY... UNLESS RESTON AND I CAN--"

"NO--! NOT SI-FAN--! NOT NOW--!"

WE CANNOT LET YOU TAKE HIM, SON OF FU MANCHU. HE BELONGS TO ANOTHER.

HEAR ME, SI-FAN... I HAVE MARKED THIS NIGHT AS THE END OF THE RIPPER'S CAREER--

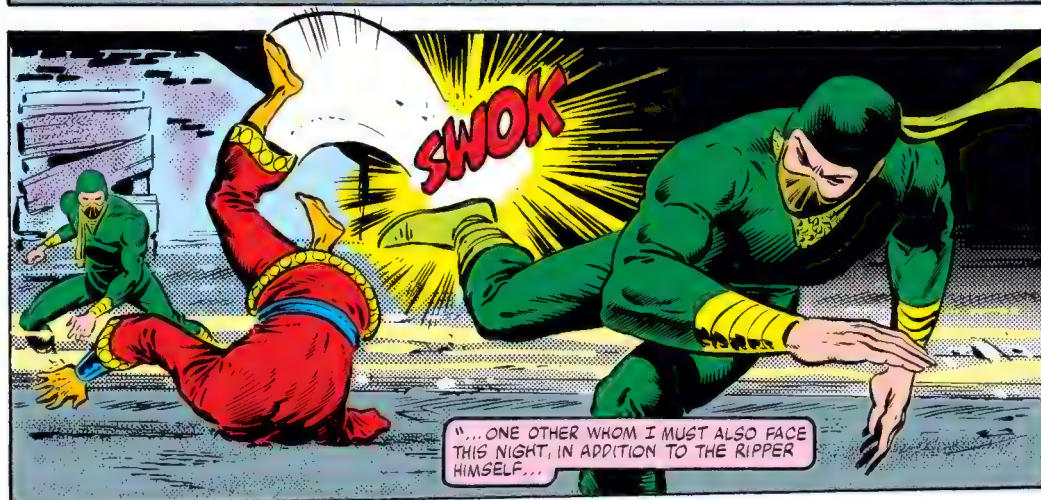
--AND NO ONE, ASSASSIN, CAN ERASE THAT MARK!

CHUD

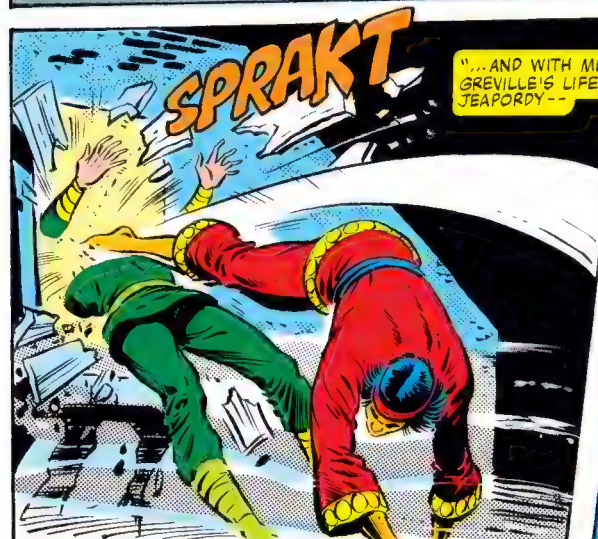
"THESE SI-FANS ARE DACOITS OF THE KIND
ONCE EMPLOYED BY MY FATHER..."



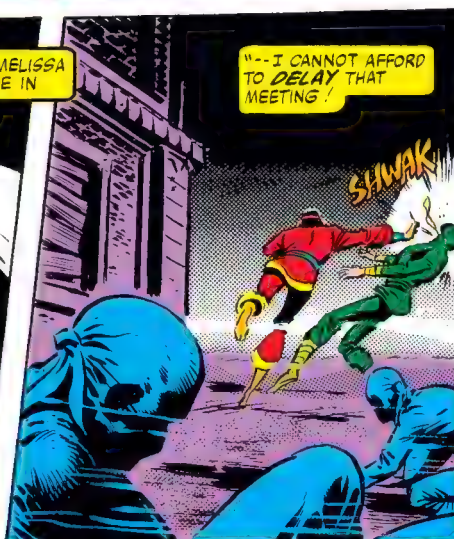
"... BUT IF FU MANCHU
IS TRULY DEAD, THEN
THERE IS ONLY ONE
OTHER WHOM THEY
CAN SERVE..."



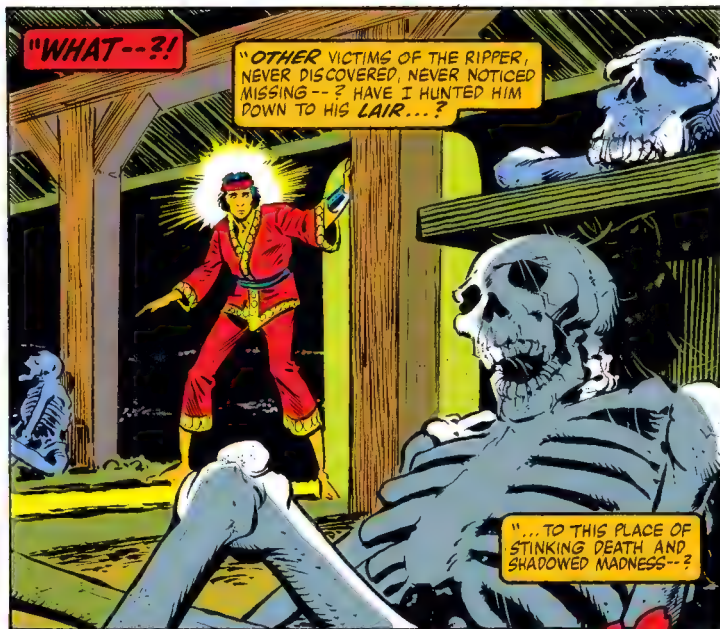
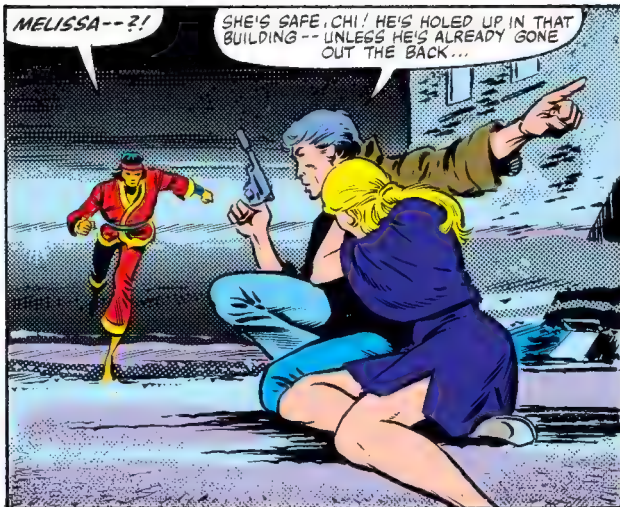
"... ONE OTHER WHOM I MUST ALSO FACE
THIS NIGHT, IN ADDITION TO THE RIPPER
HIMSELF..."

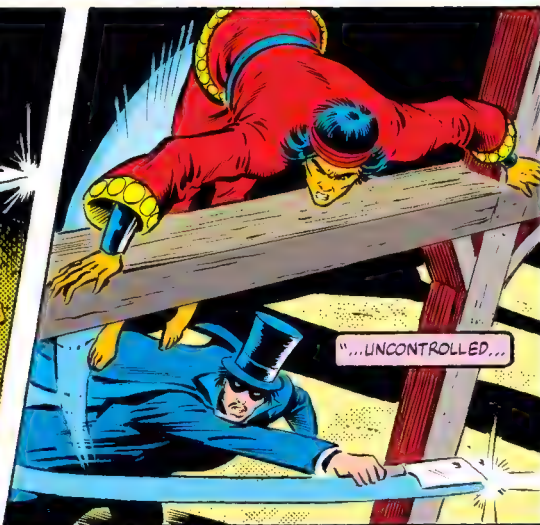
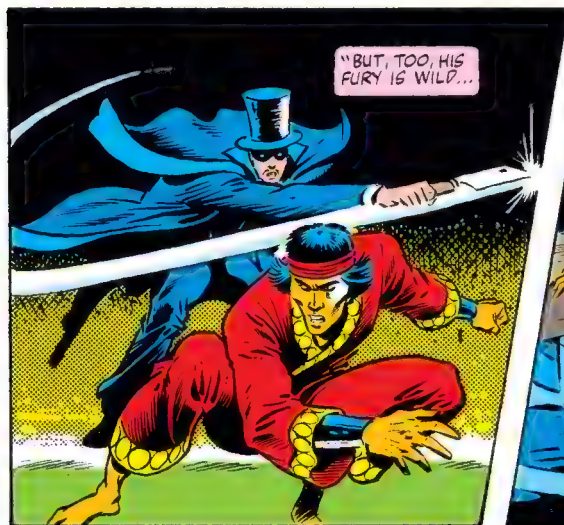
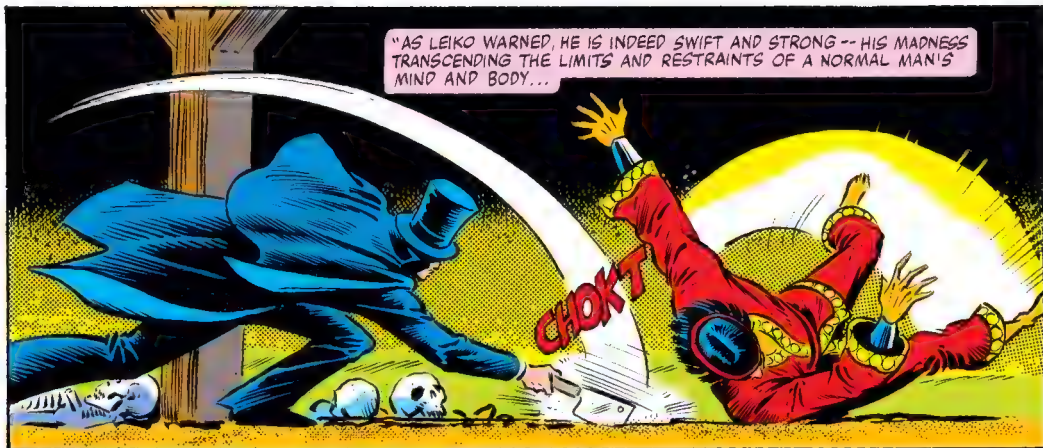


"... AND WITH MELISSA
GREVILLE'S LIFE IN
JEAPORDY--"



"-- I CANNOT AFFORD
TO DELAY THAT
MEETING!"







"--FAH LO SUEE'S LONG-AGO LOVER. HE WHO WISHED TO DO 'BUSINESS' WITH FU MANCHU... AND WHO NOW DEALS IN MADNESS AND DEATH..."

A MOMENT, PHILLIP--I MUST SPEAK WITH MY LITTLE BROTHER...

"...AS UNCHANGED NOW AS WHEN I, AS A YOUTH, FIRST SAW HIM..."



YES, LITTLE SPIRIT, HE IS IMMORTAL... UNAGING... JUST LIKE--



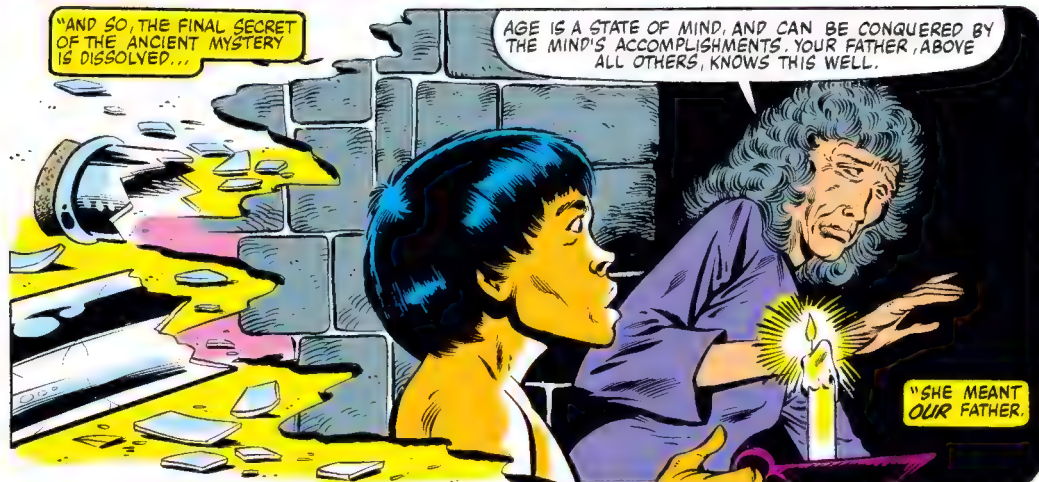
--ME... AND OUR FATHER. AND IN HIS "MEDICAL BAG"...



...THE ELIXER VITAE-- ENOUGH TO KEEP HIM ALIVE AND YOUTHFUL FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS...



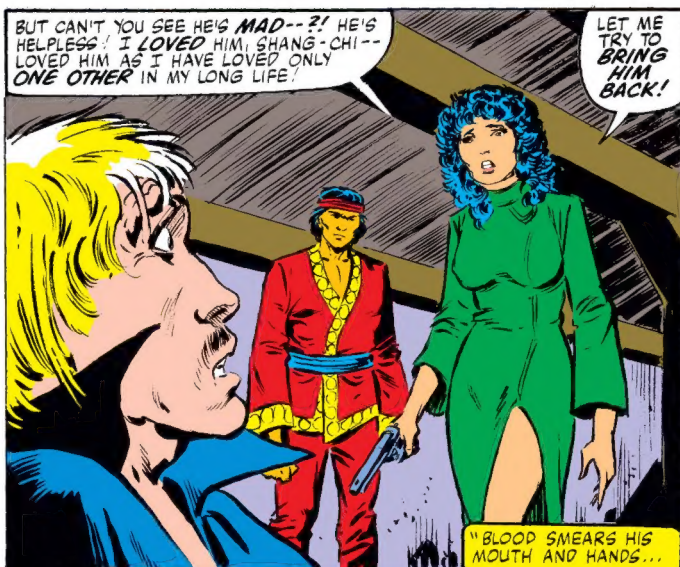
...BUT WITHOUT WHICH, HE WILL SWIFTLY AGE, AND DIE.



"AND SO, THE FINAL SECRET OF THE ANCIENT MYSTERY IS DISSOLVED..."

AGE IS A STATE OF MIND, AND CAN BE CONQUERED BY THE MIND'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS. YOUR FATHER, ABOVE ALL OTHERS, KNOWS THIS WELL.

"SHE MEANT OUR FATHER."

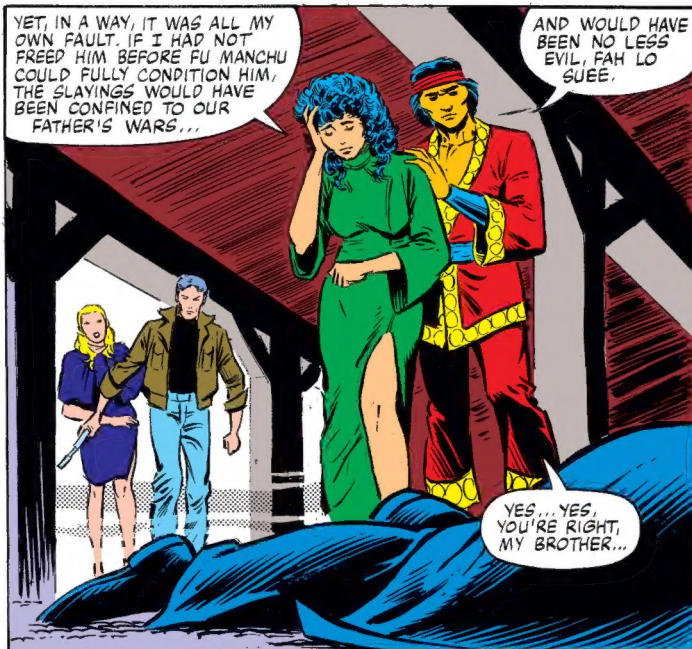






AND IT WAS OUR FATHER'S OWN TWISTED LOVE THAT DID THIS TO ME-- TOOK PHILLIP AWAY FOREVER. YOU SEE, FU MANCHU TRIED TO REGAIN MY LOVE FOR HIM BY DENYING MY LOVE FOR ANOTHER...

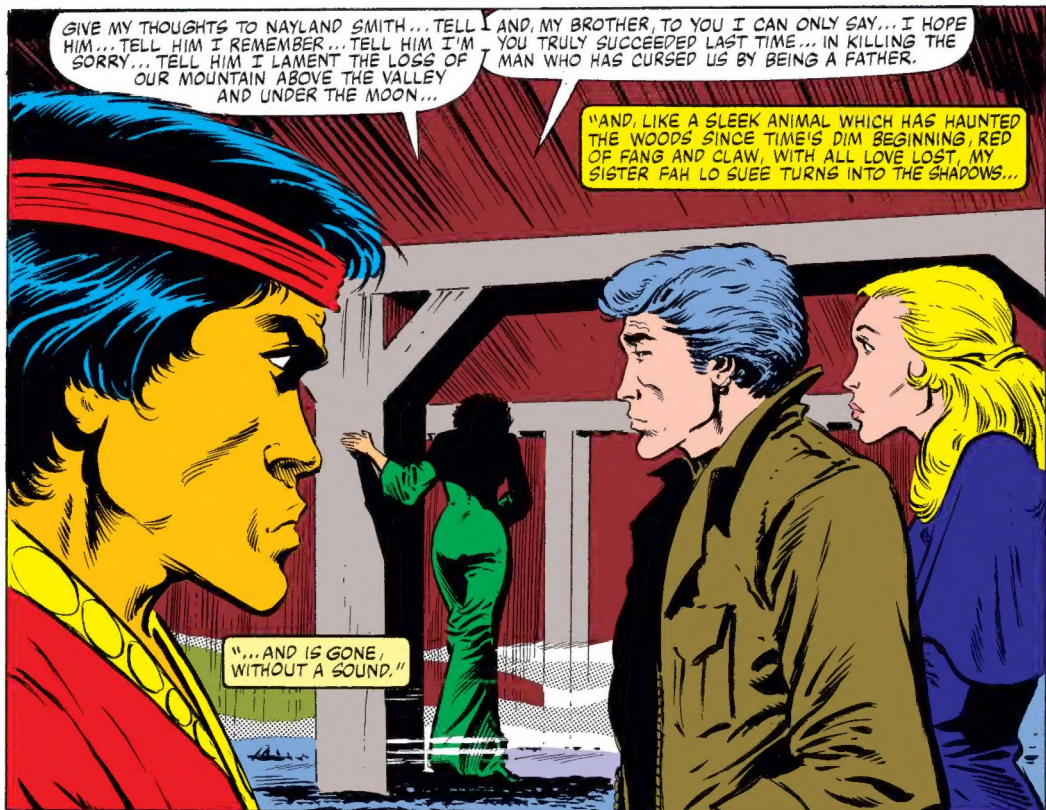
IT ONLY MADE ME DESPISE HIM ALL THE MORE.



YET, IN A WAY, IT WAS ALL MY OWN FAULT. IF I HAD NOT FREED HIM BEFORE FU MANCHU COULD FULLY CONDITION HIM, THE SLAYINGS WOULD HAVE BEEN CONFINED TO OUR FATHER'S WARS...

AND WOULD HAVE BEEN NO LESS EVIL, FAH LO SUEE.

YES... YES, YOU'RE RIGHT, MY BROTHER...



GIVE MY THOUGHTS TO NAYLAND SMITH... TELL HIM I REMEMBER... TELL HIM I'M SORRY... TELL HIM I LAMENT THE LOSS OF OUR MOUNTAIN ABOVE THE VALLEY AND UNDER THE MOON...

AND, MY BROTHER, TO YOU I CAN ONLY SAY... I HOPE YOU TRULY SUCCEEDED LAST TIME... IN KILLING THE MAN WHO HAS CURSED US BY BEING A FATHER.

"AND, LIKE A SLEEK ANIMAL WHICH HAS HAUNTED THE WOODS SINCE TIME'S DIM BEGINNING, RED OF FANG AND CLAW, WITH ALL LOVE LOST, MY SISTER FAH LO SUEE TURNS INTO THE SHADOWS...

"...AND IS GONE, WITHOUT A SOUND."

NEXT:

THE SEQUEL TO ONE OF THE MOST ACCLAIMED SHANG-CHI SAGAS OF ALL--

NOT SMOKE, NOR BEADS, NOR BLOOD...

MISSIVES TO THE MASTER!

c/o MARVEL COMICS GROUP
575 Madison Avenue
New York, New York 10022

JIM SALICRUP
EDITOR
BOB BUDIANSKY
ASSISTANT EDITOR

CREDITS, TITLE, FADE-OUT...

Quandary & solution: Seeing as how Gene Day did such an elegantly lavish job on this issue's splash page, we just couldn't bear to cut into it for a fully detailed breakdown of art credits, so we might as well rectify the matter for all you art freaks right here and now— but bear with us, 'cause it gets a mile complicated (and just to confuse the situation even more, we'll be referring to the actual *story-page numbers*, so you'll have to count 'em off between the ads for yourself)...

First, Gene Day penciled and inked pages 1-16 ("The Immortal Caravan"). Then, Mike Zeck penciled and inked pages 17-39 ("The Ancient Mystery" and "The Whitechapel Madness"). Simple enough so far, right? Ah, but now we come to those aforementioned "exceptions"...

During the period in which Mike was penciling "The Whitechapel Madness," it seems his Connecticut apartment served as a temporary haven for fellow Floridian artists Bob McLeod and John Beatty. One night the three lads, or so the story goes, decided to pass some time with a little round-robin bits & pieces inking session, simultaneously lightening Gene Day's load a trifle in the process. Now...blamed if we're gonna break it all down into precise and specific brush-strokes, but the three (Mike, John, and Bob) are somehow responsible in tandem for: All of page 31, panels 3 & 5 of page 32, all of page 36, panel 2 of page 38, and the major (foreground) figures in the last panel of the last page...

Whew!

...leaving poor me all alone with my brand-spanking-new typewriter to sort out the whole furshlugginer magilla!

Anyway, that takes care of the credits (for this issue). Onward to the title (of #96)...

Dear Doug,

One of the drawbacks to producing a feat of creation like MASTER OF KUNG FU must be the sheer exhaustion of having to do it on a monthly basis. Seldom, however, has the giddiness of late-night plotting sessions been so evident as in the title for issue #96...

I can see it all now. A dim light bulb, Doug alone, defeated, desperate at the typewriter. Creatively burned-out. What to do this month?— He racks his brains. He needs something, a handle, just the germ of an idea...anything will do.

She stares at his silent typewriter, at the perversely blank white paper sitting primly on the roll, waiting. In despair he rips it out— and the carbon falls away. He stoops to pick it up...and his eyes fall upon the logo labeling: "Carter's Super Midnight."

And there's the challenge. Make a story out of *that*!

And of course, Doug, you *did* make quite a story out of it; but then, MOKF hasn't missed a beat in nearly three years now, so what else would one expect?

I didn't like the monochromatic cover, though. Marvel seems to be experimenting with these lately (I remember a red-hued FF cover from several months back), but they don't seem to work. This one on MOKF *might* have worked, if you'd only included the title on the cover (the reference to midnight would have explained the use of dark blues)— but you didn't, and the effect came off as gratuitous. No cross words here; just a friendly word-in-the-ear. After all, I like MOKF partially due to its attitude toward experimentation, so I can hardly complain on the rare occasion when such experimentation backfires.

Nothing else of real merit to say; my annual in-depth LOC was printed only last issue. I still think MOKF is the most elegant series currently running...but I just might cringe a bit if you were to come up with a new story for next issue entitled "Smith-Corona 2200." (A time-travel story, perhaps, dealing with a female descendant of Sir Denis, who marries a chap named Corona 220 years from now...Lord, now you've got me doing it!)

Bob Rodi
34 Chatham Lane
Oak Brook, IL 60521

All right, so you hit bingo on the title, Bob— breaking your once-a-year-LOC rule in the process, no less!— but you're dead wrong on the background reconstruction, Sherlock. Far from it being a case of midnight oiled burn-out desperation, I had been itching to use "Carter's Super Midnight" as a title for ages— every time I reached into the tray for a fresh sheet of carbon paper imprinted with that title by its manufacturer. In fact, a note-scrap bearing the words "Carter's Super Midnight" and "The Darkfield Illumination" (the latter a term for special— infra-red?— photography, and which eventually became the title of a FANTASTIC

FOUR story) had been floating around my desk for *months*. Then, when I was one day telling editor Jim Salicrup about plans for a "lighter" issue of MOKF— one featuring a new black character who would at time use jive-speak as part of a cover ID— the title suddenly and finally clicked into place.

But don't worry about it happening again; I ran out of "Super Midnight" weeks ago and am now using something called "Girl Friday Solvent Film."

Say...wait a minute...on second thought...

Nah.

Time for an aside (and why not, since this entire lettercol is swiftly turning into one gigantic aside itself?). Since we're on the subject of titles, we thought we'd pass along a bizarre little item pertaining to issue #98. You'll recall the issue featured a kinda special (well, we thought it was special, anyway) tale called "Lost Art." Shortly after I finished scripting it, I received a call from Jim Salicrup which went something like this: "Doug, seeing as how you're obsessed with synchronicities, I thought you'd appreciate the latest news— we just lost the art to "Lost Art."

I replied, "It figures," without missing a beat. "What else did you expect?"

Luckily, diligent Sali and assistant Bob Budiansky had made copies of the lost art pages, which were inked and printed without any loss of quality. Ah, well, art is at its best when it exists— in a non-material form— for its own sake, no?

And that wraps up the titles, bringing us to —

— the fade-out: Next issue will be the last regular Shang-Chi story penciled by Mike Zeck. He decided to exit in style, however, and helped me co-plot a nifty sequel (or at least a a follow-up) to "Smoke, Beads, and Blood" from several years back. The basic idea to do a follow-up, in fact, was Mike's.

But not to worry: Mike is hardly severing all ties with Shang-Chi and Crew. Indeed not. Plans have already been discussed with Lynn Graeme and Ralph Macchio to team Mike and me for a special 20-25 page Shang-Chi tale to be featured in the pages of our upcoming spiffy-slick MARVEL UNIVERSE book. Mike wants, in his own words, "To do something I can really be proud of— use the story to advance, to improve my work as much as possible in a single quantum jump." Accordingly, he'll not only pencil the tale, but ink and color it as well. It should be worth looking for...

In the meantime, we're not exactly planning to print blank pages in this book, and MOKF's new artist (as of #102), is a fellow who's fairly bustin' with enthusiasm for the characters, concept, and mood of the series. He's also the one guy who can maintain that vital link with visual consistency. His name? Gene Day, of course. He and I have already discussed future plans and one of Gene's first full-fledged efforts (penciling and inking) will be another rather "special" story— set in Hong Kong and called "A City Asea." For a preview of the freshly innovative sequential layouts you can expect from Gene, just check out (once again) the first 16 pages of this very issue...

Finally, don't forget next issue: "Not Smoke, Nor Beads, Nor Blood..." And don't worry; next issue will also feature the return of a normal letters page— i.e. one with more than a single letter. See you then, and—

— fade-out...

Doug Moench

